

home design real estate



nest

FALL 2010

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8 Wood, pellet or gas?

Preparing
a house sale

Taking Stratton
and Silver Creek
commons.

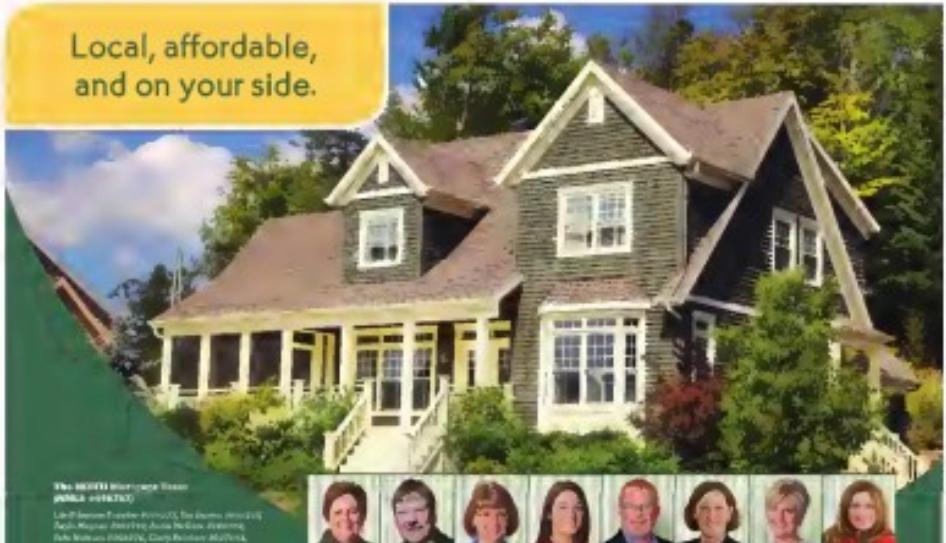
DIY project: a
stand-alone closet

ARTICLE BY PHILIPPE BOISSEAU
SEVEN DAYS



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Find. Fix. Feather.

Those three words sum up the intentions behind Seven Days' quarterly supplement about home design and real estate. If you're in the market to buy, sell, make a move or spruce up your decor, we aim to inspire.

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BY KAREN CHAMBERS VERNON

ON THE COVER

Quaker Buff Cottage by Birtwistle Building

(Photo courtesy of Birtwistle Building)

**Keep it local with this deliciously simple recipe.****CHEESE TRADERS**

FALL NIGHT IN MAC & CHEESE

8 Tb (16oz) Vermont Creamery reduced butter

4 oz all-purpose flour

1 lg. Kraftfield Brook Farm Organic Whole Milk

1 lb. Grafton Cheddar (or 1lb. Regular)

8 oz. Gruyere, grated

3 oz. Danish Blue Cheese, crumbled

1 cup Centro Romano cheese

Step 1

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Add pasta to boiling salted water and cook for 11 minutes. Meanwhile, heat milk over medium heat, but keep from boiling.

Step 2

Melt 6 Tb butter in a large pot, add flour and whisk over low heat for about 2 minutes. Add heated milk and continue whisking until thick and smooth. Remove from heat.

Step 3

Add Cheddar, Gruyere, Blue Cheese and salt & pepper to taste. Stir in cooked pasta, mix well, and pour into a large baking dish. Top with breadcrumbs and dolbs of remaining butter. Bake for 35-40 minutes until bubbly and browned.

Enjoy!

"Get creamy by adding some extra Vermont bacon and a dash of cayenne to the cheese mixture before baking."

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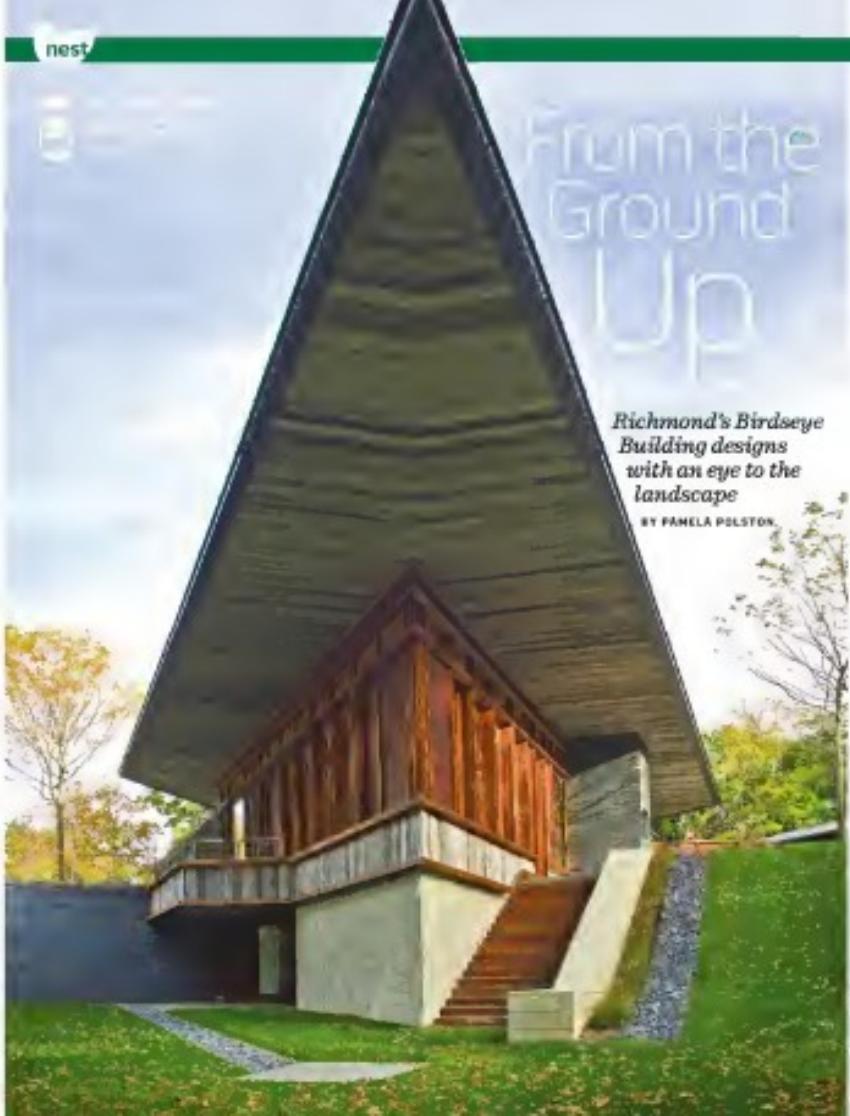
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From the Ground Up

*Richmond's Birdseye
Building designs
with an eye to the
landscape*

BY PAMELA POLSTON



ROB ANDERSON/STOCK

VILLA 2014

BEST OF BLDG.

4 HOMES

Exemplary
Modern
She-Burns

PHOTO COURTESY
OF SHE-BURNS

The menu bar on Birdseye Building's website immediately conveys what the text means by "full-service custom home design-build company." It means more than drawing up plans and constructing a house, though the Richmond-based business excels at that. Click on any of the other tabs — "Woodworking," "Metal & Glass," "Batemwork" and "Energy" — to see just how Birdseye has evolved over three decades.

Yup, the company can manufacture a unique metal handrail, carve out a metal driveway or install a tidy array of solar collectors. Yet Birdseye is still best known, and justifiably so, for its houses.

When John Sebert and Jim Converse launched Birdseye 33 years ago, they may not have anticipated the diversity of the residences they would eventually construct: a minimalist hot tub nestled on a lakeside hill; a sprawling, New England vernacular fine-house; an urban oasis of warm woods and native stone. And, like any young entrepreneurs, they surely had no idea how their company would grow — that it would add designers and architects, or artisans in wood, metal and glass. Or that it would eventually become employee-owned.

Throughout Birdseye's diverse styles and services lies a theme: reverence for craftsmanship.

Though Birdseye is an ESOP (a company with no employee stock ownership plan), most employees map their work independently. During a tour of the company's rambling quarters on Harrington Road, principal architect Brian Mac — who started Birdseye Design 12 years ago — explains that "ideally, we all work on the same project, but I might take a job elsewhere and work with other builders and the [Birdseye] builders

might work with other architects." The wood and metal shops, run by Jonathan Schaefer and Cheba Bush, respectively, also create products independently. Sebert and Converse, Mac says, act as general contractors, do the company's manufacturing and "oversee everything."

A Detroit native, Mac recalls a visit to Vermont some two decades ago that included taking in a Bread and Puppet Circus. The experience helped pull him on the state, he says, and subsequently quickly introduced him to "a group of people involved in Birdseye." Originally he wanted to learn woodworking — "I helped build the Pitcher Inn [in Warren]," Mac notes. "But eventually I'd had enough of working construction, and I got back into architecture."

It was a good move. He counts his own Waterbury home among the many he's designed over 17 years. Though some jobs have taken him out of state, most of Birdseye's projects are within an hour and a half of its Richmond HQ.

Nearly all of that work is residential, but one exception photo depicts a commercial space: locally Next Door Bistro/gas house. Prince Charming Cellars in Cherry Street know about this sister restaurant, which is, well, right next door.

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER J. HARRIS



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From the Ground Up 47

Mac says he designed it as something of a sister to owners Charles Reeves and Stobly Glose — it's a fan of their popular breakfast, tea. The windows and Lucky sign display artisanal craftsmanship, and, along with the earthy wood interior, speak to Mac's elegant design vocabulary.

After the Lucky job, Mac says, he got "a ton of calls" about other commercial

**IN THE END,
IT'S ALL ABOUT
MAKING IT PRETTY.**

BRIAN MAC

projects, but none has yet materialized. He doesn't seem to mind; some 30 projects, large and small, are on his docket at the moment.

Speaking for himself and for Redeye collectively, Mac describes an aesthetic that is "grounded in place first." When people buy a property, he notes, it's usually about the landscape. "I like to keep things quiet and beautiful, but fun



BRUNO PELLE / VILLE PELLE



PHOTO BY BRUNO PELLE / VILLE PELLE

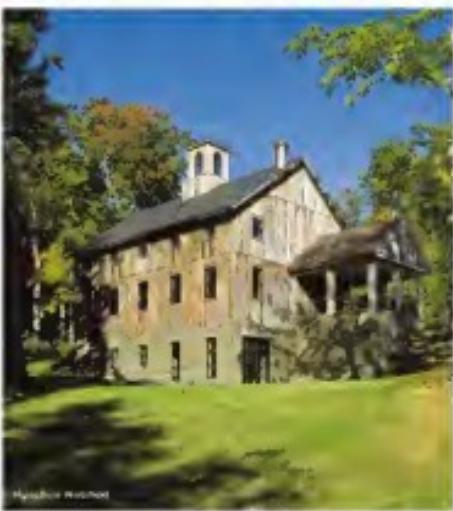
all about premising what an architect can do," Mac says. Sustainability is important, too, and not just for practical considerations. "It's sustainable because it's beautiful," he says. "In the end, it's all about making it pretty."

Besheger tended itself seem to be

a sustainable one. Everyone, from the designer to the diggers to the carpenters and exhibitors, were on the same page, each person's expertise informing the others. "We are all integral to what is essential in the project," Mac concludes.



Under Hull Cottage, Duxbury



Mountain View Inn

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A photograph of a kitchen interior. The kitchen has wooden cabinets and a dark countertop. In the foreground, there is a red heart graphic with the text "WE ❤ small kitchens!" next to it. Below the heart, there is more text: "For Info & Images: Kitchenforfoodies.blogspot.com".

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Getting Warmer

What's the best hottie for your house?

BY MARY ANN LICKTEIG

Not long after I moved to Vermont, someone informed me — by way of helpful orientation — that my new home state enjoys nine months of winter and three months of damn poor skiing.

In pre-snow, I'm a fan of some epic snow drapes (Valentine's Day 2007, anyone?), justified in my multiple winter coats, come to a deep understanding of how Vermont could have dozens of words for snow, and added the terms "no'buster" and "scroched cold" to my vocabulary. As someone whose fingers go numb in the grocery store section, it's high time I learned how to take the chill off.

My husband and I are shopping for a fireplace insert. Basic biomass taught us that we have three fuel options: natural gas, wood and pellets. And burning logs in the fireplace isn't an option. Wood-burning fireplaces typically lose more heat than they generate. "We call them steam evaporators," said Roy L'Esperance, who owns the Chimney Sweep Fireplace Shop in St. Albans. Also, ours makes up the house, owing to a cold exterior chimney that can't help but comply with the laws of thermodynamics.

I arrived at the Chimney Sweep thinking we'd settled on a wood-burning insert. Then I met L'Esperance. "Well, the wood's romantic, cozy and traditional, and a very practical alternative," he said, smiling. "But then he pointed a remote control at the fireplace. Xtremefire 650 and clicked. Within two seconds, flames danced in the ethanol-gas insert, fire embers glowed and my results method-

Despite that wintery moment, we hasn't yet settled on a purchase. My husband still rather for wood, arguing that it's the best work for our kids. While I also prefer wood for its authenticity, I suggest the work it entails would translate to far fewer cozy nights in front of a fire.

To pick the freestanding stove or fireplace insert that's right for you, you need to consider year-round, your access to fuel and whether you want the unit to provide ambiance or the lion's share of your heating — which all three fuel options can do.

And consider this: In addition to choosing fuel type, you need to pick a material. Stones and inserts commonly come in their stone, cast iron and suspension. Steel is the strongest, burns the fastest and loses heat the fastest. Cast iron and suspension offer softer heat. They take longer to heat up and radiate heat longer, with suspension being the slowest to heat

and to cool.

Read on for insight from L'Esperance, as well as from Lee Miller, an installer and salesman at Steve & Biggs Works in Williston, and Adam Sherman, who runs the Biomass Energy Resource Center at Vermont Energy Resource Corporations. For additional tips at this point, try tinyurl.com/vermontfire.

WOOD'S ROMANTIC, COZY AND TRADITIONAL, AND A VERY PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE

ROY L'ESPERANCE



Pellet

THE PROS: Pure cellulose cores pressed into cylindrical pellets that look like rabbit food; they burn hot and clean. The units are thermostatically controlled, heavier, circulate heat, and don't have to have a traditional chimney. Eight years ago Sherman put a pellet stove in his new home in Richmond, which had propane heat. He paid \$1,200 for a Harmon stove rated for 30,000 BTUs per hour, on which he now relies to provide 100 percent of the space heat for his 1,600-square-foot house. "We paid for that investment in less than 18 months," Sherman said.



THE CONS: Though credited with being cleaner than wood, pellets are dusty when combustion particles prone to asthma. L'Esperance pointed out, Units rely on electricity and require the most consumer maintenance of the options. Owners must empty ash once or twice a week, ensure their air holes are clear, clean the burn pot two or three times weekly and clean the heat exchanger monthly. Pellets burn with more heat and more efficiently than wood, but these units have more parts to break. While the fire can be mesmerizing, it doesn't have the cozy fireplace feel. Terms: "It's like a slow-burner." L'Esperance said.

Natural gas

THE PROS: Clean, quick and economical, gas can be controlled by a thermostat or a remote and used without a traditional chimney or electricity — though you wouldn't have use of the flue if a power outage occurred. Compared with wood and propane, gas is the most efficient and emits the least particulate matter. It's ideal for people living in the Chittenden and Franklin county towns that are an natural gas lines U.S. experience.

When you're doing a project, you're looking at a busy lifestyle where you can basically have a fire for 20 minutes while you're having your coffee in the morning. And you can have warmth without turning on your central heating system in early spring, or late fall — the so-called "shoulder seasons."



Cord wood

THE PROS: Traditional Ambiance. Herringbone wood fireplaces look good for the money. And of course, it's wood without electricity. In a pinch, you can burn just about anything. If you need to, Miller said, U.S. experience sees wood as ideal for people who live on 10 acres or more. Burlington, however, trees that need to be cleared up and can submit state wood dollars for oil or propane delivery. And he said you get to cut and stack wood — invigorating after the great outdoors.

THE CONS: You have to cut and stack wood. Wood needs to dry, it can be messy. You have to have a chimney. Creosote can build up through stoves and inserts especially after secondary burns to help prevent them. Of the three kinds considered, it is the least efficient.

and birds. The most particulates Sherman noted. But with new technology both wood and pellet units have improved in both these areas. Look for the permanent initial BTU conversion label on the back of the stove.



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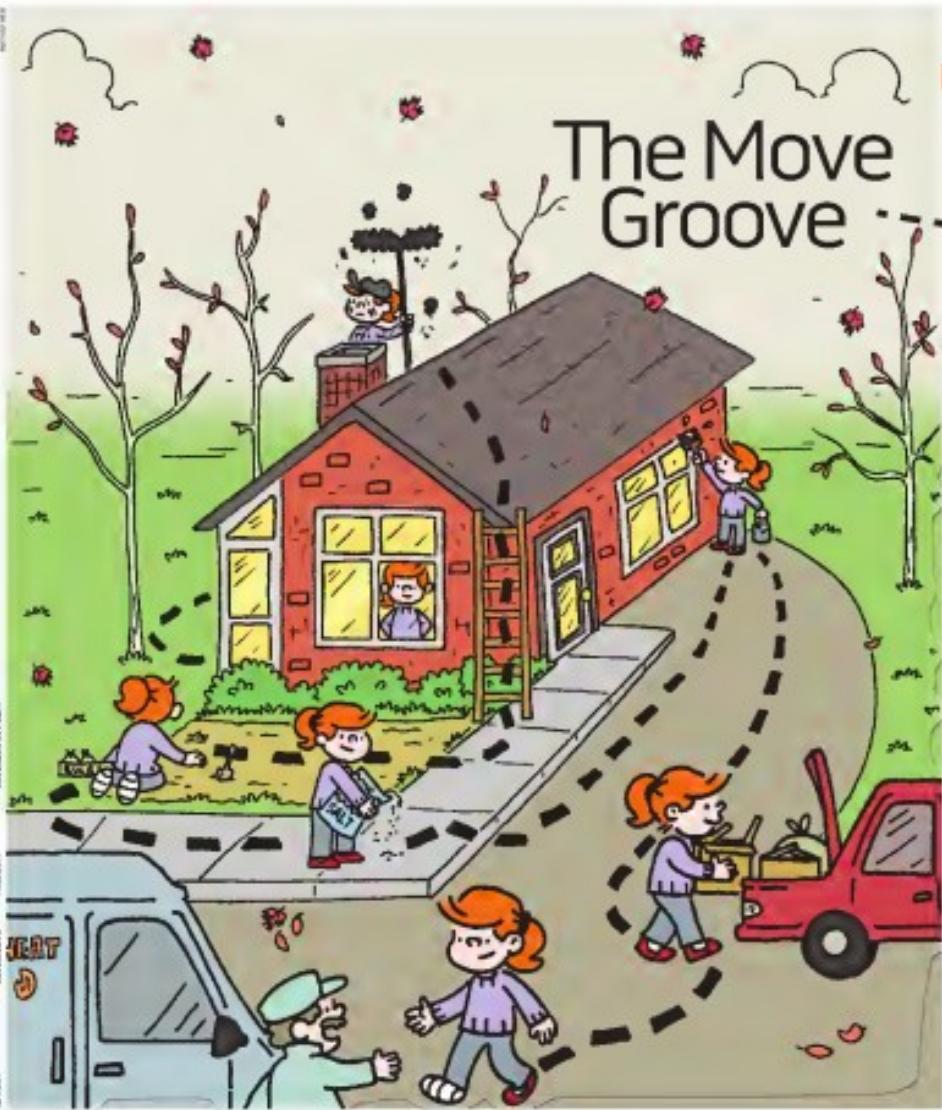
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BEST FRIENDS

FAMILY

ROBUSTNESS

WEAR



Real estate experts offer tips to prepare your home for the spring market

BY KEN PICARD

So your house has finally reached maximum capacity. When you bought that cozy two-bedroom, one-bathroom ranch, you were single and had more space than you needed.

Fast-forward 10 years. Now you've got a spouse, two kids, a dog and enough garden tools and sporting goods to start a summer camp. The kids share one bed, and the novelty of the entire family crowded into a single bathroom each morning has worn thin.

In short, it's time for new digs. But not many sellers want to put their houses on the market in the winter; when each of its six square feet is buried, like the curb itself, beneath three feet of snow.

Fear not, Vermonters! Our real estate professionals say there's a lot that a seller can do in advance to prepare their house for sale in the spring — or sooner, if they're willing to list it in January and February. Because many of these projects take time and money, the experts recommend starting soon, so the "For Sale" sign can sprout with the crocuses.

1. LET THERE BE LIGHT

Before the weather gets too cold, rule out gardens, snow-capped flowerpots and stone paths favorite, recommends Bobbi Hardy. He loves a real estate agent with Century 21 Jack Associates in South Burlington. Though lawns and gardens never look their best from late fall to early spring, putting down fresh mulch and hanging a seasonal wreath on the front door can add a splash of color to an otherwise drab-looking exterior.

Ortiz for repairing screens and weatherstripping windows before the mercury falls below freezing. Shiny windows

and open blinds not only brighten a house, Hardy Holmes says, but also make it look bigger. And she puts it, "You all about first impressions."

2. DECLUTTER AND DE-CHOTCKE

Your pristine collection of miniature lighthouses might be worth thousands of dollars, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a real estate agent who's ever sold a house based on the ridiculous value of knickknacks.

For spring sellers, fall and winter are excellent times to box up those giant collections, pore through the basement and closet, and purge once-hands of old clothes, books and other household items that won't go to the new house. Clear off counter tops and cover or toss the clutter. "We all have our clutter spots, and it's hard to live in a house and sell it at the same time," Hardy Holmes says. "But it's important to walk into a house where it looks like the seller really wants to sell."



Carol Andere, with Coldwell Banker Heuck & Bourneau Realty in Burlington, suggests donating those odds and ends to Goodwill, RE SOURCE, the Salvation Army or the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program.



3. FRESHEN THOSE WALLS — AND LOSE THE WALLPAPER!

After you've decluttered, a fresh coat of paint is the cheapest and easiest home improvement project there is. And it's suggested several colors, such as off-white or cream, and recommends getting rid of wallpaper, especially if it's peeling, and replacing it with a solid paint job.

4. KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The last thing a seller wants is to learn about a major deficiency in a house's roof, plumbing, foundation or electrical system after that house is under contract. A building inspection in advance lets you know exactly which problems may leave your asking price — or scuttle the deal entirely.

In some cases, new laws and building codes have been added since the house last changed hands. For a Vermont house that hasn't sold in at least a decade, they include laws related to photovoltaic module alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and overflow tanks on water heaters.

Andere also advises that if you're planning to sell your house, you should make an appointment to get it inspected by the fire marshal — another requirement prior to sale.

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The Move Groove

5. CLEAN IS GREEN

As homeowners head into winter, Audi suggests that homeowners get their fireplaces and chimneys professionally cleaned and inspected. If the house has an oil tank, get it checked and certified by a professional — another new requirement before sale in Vermont.

A clean heating system doesn't just make the house smell better, feel warmer and look well-maintained. It also lowers your heating costs — another selling point for potential buyers.

6. GET YOUR PAPERWORK IN ORDER

The vast majority of people who sell their house buy another one. All the real estate experts agree that if you're planning today as well as in next year, it behooves you to get your paperwork and finances in order in advance. That means everything from obtaining copies of your existing mortgage and deed to obtaining preapproval letters from a lender.

Also, if you've done any exterior work, such as additions or new decks, check that you've obtained all the necessary permits — and ensure that they're on file with your town or city clerk.



7. FOR SOME, COLD IS GOLD

While most sellers prefer to wait until their front lawn is lush before planting a "For Sale" sign on it, Marla Wolf, director of marketing at Long McLaughlin Real Estate in South Burlington, points out that many sellers now list their homes throughout the winter. "Why? Because buyers are out there, especially after hours of digging sales."

This year, Wolf notes, while the Vermont housing market peaked at about 3,000 homes for sale in July, 2,560 homes were for sale in January. And, while 620 houses sold in July, the hottest month for buyers, 254 moved in January. In short, she says, people who house-sit in winter are often more motivated today, owing to a new job or other life transition, and may be willing to pay more.

"People think that nobody is buying real estate over the winter," Wolf says. "But that's part not true."

If you are selling in winter, she says, put lights, inside and out, on timers and post seasonally appropriate photos of the house online. Also, if your house is already empty, turn on the heat, at least while potential buyers are walking through it.

"I've been in some of those houses where the heat is off," Wolf says, "and people don't stick around too long."

Even if your house doesn't sell in the winter, having it on the market leaves you better positioned to attract buyers who will return with the return of spring. ■

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Touring two of Burlington's newest housing developments

BY XIAN CHIANG-MAREN

BURLINGTON

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NEARBY



APARTMENTS



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of Sam's.

Who wouldn't want to live in Burlington? The Queen City's got it all: a bustling downtown, leafy residential streets (at least for half the year), the waterfront and proximity to great skiing — not to mention all the restaurants, movies, museums and theaters.

Until recently, there seemed to be just one thing that Burlington didn't have: new apartment units. Through the city's older and historic apartments have their charm, rooms and layouts are the best for now; sleeker shades have had few options. Despite demand for market-rate rental units and condos, development of new housing complexes seemed to crawl during the recession.

"For many years we didn't see a lot of new apartment buildings being built in Burlington, because the numbers just didn't work," says Erik Blakstad, a partner at Radisson Commercial Group.

Now, though, interest rates are low, and new housing projects are on the rise around town. More than 900 new rental units have been proposed for Burlington, according to estimates by real estate advisory firm Allen & Brooks, as Seven Days reported earlier this year.

Those searching for a contemporary apartment in the Queen City are finally in luck. Not long ago two new Burlington developments — the Stratos building on St. Paul Street and SilverSmith Commons on North Winooski Avenue — began to take up some of the new space.

Stratos

101 St. Paul Street, Burlington

RE/MAX North Professionals 860-860-5100 stratosvt.com

Located just a block from City Hall Park and the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, with urban and lake views from their balconies, the condominiums in the Stratos development practically sell themselves. "It's one of the best locations in all of Burlington," boasts Bill Desrosiers, the project's real estate agent and owner of RE/MAX North Professionals. **39** ▶

SILVERSMITH COMMONS

250-260 North Winooski Avenue, Burlington

Providence Commercial Group 860-240-3636 silversmithcommons.com

Two eleven-story, three-story buildings on North Winooski Avenue — with a still-available retail unit on the ground floor — form SilverSmith Commons. It's one of several modern, condominium-style projects currently under way in Burlington. **39** ▶



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Decor Furniture Housewares Gifts Toys 52 Church St, Burlington 863-4544 www.homeportonline.com Monday-Saturday 10A-6P and Sunday 11A-6P

Stratos

The 30,221-square-foot building has a sleek, shiny facade and contains 34 condominiums that range in size from 500 to 1,690 square feet. The aesthetic is modern and minimalist: white walls, hardwood floors or plush carpets, neutral shades, big glass windows, aluminum framing on the balconies.

"There's an incredible amount of glass within the unit; they're very bright overall," says Desautels. "They are a bit more bright than some of the other offerings you find in the area."

The units have been in high demand. Only one remains on the market, though construction just wrapped in June (one other condo is currently available for rent). "We sold most of them early," Desautels explains. Residents include executives, young professionals and "a few snowbirds."

The smaller Stratos condos sell for about \$300,000, while the larger units with lake views climb into the low \$600,000 range. Several owners who don't live in the building are renting out units, for about \$2,500 per month.

Desautels says that "reasonably affordable" gets the loudest and the quality of materials that went into building the apartments. There's also covered parking and laundry. "The big community is being developed," Desautels says.

In fact, he was so sold on Stratos that he moved in himself. "I downsized from a 2,300-square-foot home out in the country," Desautels says. "And I'm loving it. I absolutely love, love, love it. Why? Because it's a simpler lifestyle. And I can walk to everything I need to do."



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RSVP by Tuesday, September 30, at noon at sevendaysvt.com/houseparty

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Silversmith

Silversmith was originally intended to be a condominium building, but Bedstroll decided to develop the units as market-rate rental housing with the option of transitioning to condos later on.

The residence, light-filled apartments retain a condo look, though averaging 780 square feet, they have bamboo floors, gray and white walls and brand-new, energy-efficient appliances. The building contains two one-bedrooms and 20 two-bedrooms; Bedstroll is currently leasing the units starting at \$1,550.

Hallways and common areas are decked out in deep navy and gray, with the occasional exposed-veneer wall—in the basement, for instance, which contains coin-operated laundry facilities and tenant storage lockers. The location is also a plus. Popular Old North End eateries such as Bistro

Bakery & Cafe and Pho Hoang are a short walk from the front door, and Church Street is just a 10-minute walk.

For Bedstroll partner Erik Hækken, Silversmith Commons has personal significance. His office around the corner and he believes that the development is a positive step for the neighborhood.

Silversmith tenants are mostly young and/or single professionals and graduate students. "People living here strengthen the market for retail," Hækken points out. "They have a little bit of disposable income to spend at the bakeries and restaurants."

"There's been a lot of great rentalization in this neighborhood for over 30 years," he says. "The price we've been offering is market-rate [rental] housing. What makes neighborhood healthy is diversity across incomes."



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Wardrobe Triumph

How to make a stand-alone closet

BY XIAN CHIANG-WAREN

Nothing kills the look of a bedroom like clothing clutter. I'm just as guilty as the next person of tearing through drawers looking for one specific thing, and hurrying out the door, leaving the mess right where it fell — for days.

OK, so some people are more inclined to have messy bedrooms than others. In my defense, though, it's been a while since I've had a proper place to store my clothes. As most people who live in dormitories or shared living quarters know, all rooms are not created equal, and it can be tricky to figure out who gets which one.

There's the room with the view; the room with the pinkish bathroom; the room with the exposed brick wall; and the room with the big, walk-in closet. In the case of the dwellings that my roommate and I have recently occupied, the room with the only closet. (She always gets the closet. Her clothes are way nice.)

Materials



WARDROBE TRIUMPH: JEFFREY

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Wardrobe Triumph

When moving day came around at the end of August, I packed my bags, loaded them into a big yellow Penske truck and vowed that this move would be different. Our new place is way more spacious than the fairly cramped apartment we were leaving behind. But... who really knew? It also has only one bathroom with a clawfoot.

Determined to solve this major household crisis of my youth once and for all, I did what any self-respecting twentysomething would do: I logged on to Pinterest.

Prominently, those crafty folks on the internet had a ton of do-it-yourself suggestions for those of us who'd run out of room in our closets, or simply didn't have one. (The Pinterest pros were to be believed, a range of simple, fool-proof options for attractive, stand-alone closets were at my fingertips.)

A standing closet, I recall, could be made from just about any frame. The slacker in me was tempted to just bring a pole in the corner (inside from a hand-chipped birch sapling). With enough From antique-celing brackets, and maybe stuck some nail cranes (antique, wood, with a original oak lettering) underneath it for shoe storage, that I decided to challenge myself with a more involved project.

One standing closet in particular caught my eye: a frame made from two mismatched wooden ladders, connected by a short rod fastened with pipe straps, on the top rung, and simple plywood boards resting on the bottom rung for shoe storage. I liked the clean lines, the rememberable size, the rustic look and that there weren't many steps or materials to figure out.

That Pinterest DOWF'er made it look so easy, but my experience turned out to be a bit more complicated. I searched the Burlington area for an affordable antique wooden ladder, but

it turns out antique wooden ladders are kind of a thing. They've lived to find, and when you do find them, they're a little on the pricey side. (That means out of budget for those of us closet-less plebes still splitting the rent, at least.)

Plenty of home stores have appealing ranges of well-designed standing closets, but at that point, I was determined to hang my clothes on something I'd make myself.

So I took matters into my own hands — or rather, into the hands of the good people at Home Depot in Williston. And it turns out that those D-I-Y legos were right about one thing: You can make a functional standing closet frame out of just about anything.

At the store, I chose four pieces of rough,

smooth-tell larch wood — each 8 ft. long (at \$8 a pop, these were a low-risk option), which sort of had the rustic look of the antique wooden-ladder frame, without the classiness and charm taggy splintered white paint. At any rate, they were more interesting than two-by-fours.

At a friend's suggestion, I didn't try to re-create the ladder; but made the ends of the frame by "notching" the ends of the wood toward each other like a sawing set — a more structurally sound shape, I'm told.

Each set of two pieces of ladder was attached at the top with black pipe straps (\$2 each), and again a foot or so off the floor by a one-foot piece of wood. I used pipe straps to fasten a wooden board (\$7) and pine ribs are up, bracer, horizontal as well to the top, where it sits ready in the angled groove of a fabric hanger where the lumber pieces touched.

As a finishing touch, I ran a board across the one-by-one at the base for a shelf and — voilà! — I'd made my own standing closet, in less than an hour and for less than \$30.



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